

HEROES

by

Calvin Johnston

4 Harper's Magazine, April 1910

HV 2345 J

HV 2345
I 64 1910



AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

H V 2345

J.

cop. 1

Harpur's magazine, C1

April 1910

Heroes

BY CALVIN JOHNSTON

AFTER Dad had stayed to shut off steam, the time his engine jumped the "S" curve, I was kind of adopted by the railroad company, and the Superintendent made me night call-boy. But it was Uncle Epic who gave me a home in his house at the edge o' town, where, between his pension and my salary, we managed to keep the cracker line open.

The old, torn piece o' battle-flag hung on the wall of the parlor, which was in front of the other two rooms, and one morning Uncle Epic told me: "At the foot o' the hill the Johnnies fit me to a stan'still for a second. Then I took the flag away from 'em and marched on; and as I clim up one side o' the hill they clim down on the other—"

Well, I was ashamed to find myself noddin', with this history bein' told, but it seemed like I'd walked a hundred miles the night before, callin' out train crews; and I thought I could see Uncle Epic under the flag, with a lantern in his hand, havin' a battle to get the men o' Number Sixteen out o' bed at two in the mornin'.

He thumped his cane on the floor like a cannon-shot. "You'd sit and go to sleep if Old Grant was tellin' you about the battle o' Lookout Mountain," he said.

"You just tell about it and see," I answered, and he did, till I was wide awake.

"They ain't any boys these days like the boys o' '62," he said then, and it made me pretty blue to find this out again. For I'd hoped to live at the same time with great men like George Washin'ton and Old Grant; but they'd done about everything there was to do for their country, leavin' us nothin' but to stand still and look back.

"If anything good turned up, don't you think we'd march out to battle in armies?" I asked.

"You might march a little," answered Uncle Epic; then he felt his way out-

doors with his stick, for he would never sight over a gun no more. Under the window I heard him stop and sigh, and though I got the war book down on the floor and looked it through, I couldn't forget that sigh. For I understood what he was dreamin' of, and seein' in his blind way—the Hero City, with its marbles and woods, and the great dome o' the Capitol shinin' under the windy flags.

"If I could take him there once again," I thought, for it's hard luck to have such a place built by the country, when the country is your own savin's, and then not be able to live in it.

"I bet they miss Uncle Epic in Washin'ton, and wonder why he ain't been there," I thought, and was ashamed I was too pore to take him. Then I fell asleep on the war book and dreamed o' heroes quarrellin' with bayonets, in a dim way, but I couldn't do as well even when asleep as Uncle Epic could awake. Why, he'd bring out those old pictures in bright colors, which was wonderful for a blind man; but mine just crumbled away into smoke, and when I woke it was too late to try dreamin' 'em over again.

I shivered as if lyin' stark on a battle-field instead of the kitchen floor; for the northwest wind, all coated with leaves, had begun to prowl like the wolf at the door durin' the fall evenin's, and blew his cold breath through the crack.

"They fit me to a stan'still for a minute," Uncle Epic was sayin', as he set the table for supper—which he could cook as well as a seein' man; "then me and the boys march on and on, with the flag which they've built a city under. I reckon all the skies there is like one great flag broke out; I just knew I could see that city again if I was ever led to it. But I'm marchin' on fast, and it 'll soon be left far behin' to old Comrade Epic."

He found I was awake now, and with one last word stopped talkin' to himself: "But I'd turn 'round square in the face o' Paradise to look back at it; an' if that there is treason, they can make the most of it."

As I couldn't comfort him any, I didn't let him know he'd been eaves-dropped, and we ate supper without talkin'. Then it was dusk, and my time to go, so I lit the lantern and pretended to drum reveille on the window-pane.

"It's reveille for you," said the old man, "but it's taps for me. All you have to fight is the railroad company for a raise; the worl's all cheerful and light to you—"

It was black night outside, and stormy, but o' course he couldn't tell the difference; I guess he thought it was only blindness and the noise of old battles.

I couldn't leave him like this, and at last did somethin' I'd never dared before. I brought the Ginerals' old black cigar from under its glass case in the front parlor, and said, "Take a whiff o' this."

He sat still a minute and then answered: "Benny, you oughtn't to tempt me. 'Tain't been over thirty year since I smoked the other one. Still, I'll whiff on it a minute, though I won't light it till I'm in Washin'ton."

There was a lot o' history in that cigar, and I didn't blame him for not smokin' it outright; but he settled back peaceful with it between his lips, and after while I went out without sayin' good night. I seemed to hear troopers gallopin' past as the trees crashed together in the windy dark; and leaves rushed up the foot-path in battalions, whisperin' and stormin' into my face like mad. But this was as far as I could imagine things, and the rest o' the way I could see only bare streets and streamin' gas-lamps, till I came to the station. But Uncle Epic could have seen great pictures in *his* darkness.

As I was copyin' the list o' crews to be called, the Superintendent came into the office with a strange gentleman. "Ben," he said, "they'll be hard to rout out o' bed this kind o' night."

"I'll go after 'em like a stormin' party," I answered.

He laughed. "That old uncle o' yours has been chargin' up Lookout Mountain

again. Does he still think the country owes Washin'ton to him?"

I couldn't answer, and the Superintendent went on, to the stranger: "Uncle Epic is a hero, and can't get over it, Mr. Winslow."

Then I knew this gentleman to be the General Manager, and looked up. He was a small, quick man, with gray hair and very sharp eyes. "I think rather more o' the railroad heroes than o' those who saved the country," he said, in a dry way.

Maybe the Superintendent saw that all this made me look ashamed—though it wasn't for Uncle Epic.

"Ben's father was the man who stayed by his engine in the 'S' wreck," he spoke up, layin' his hand on my shoulder, and Mr. Winslow nodded.

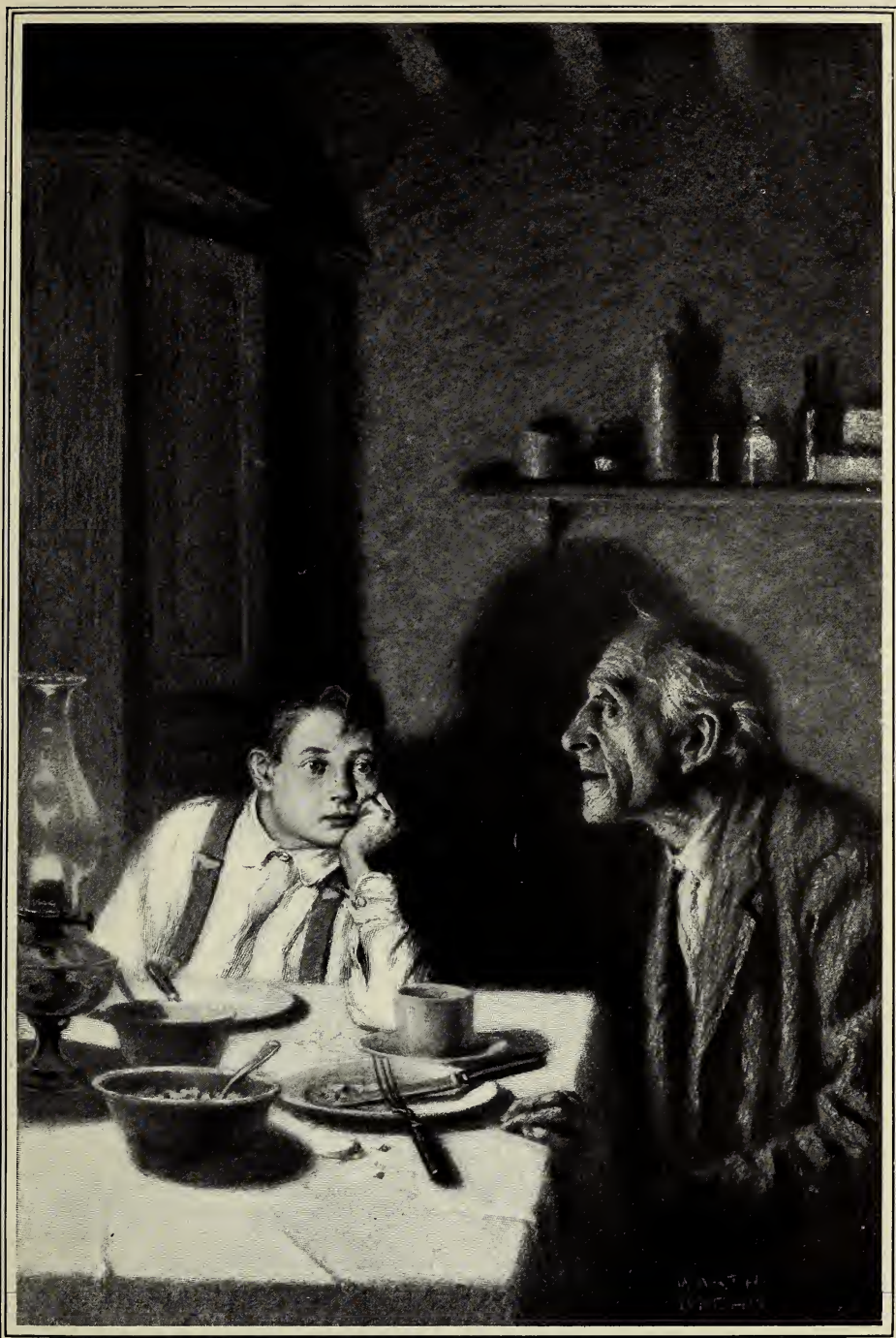
"There ought to be good stuff in you," he said to me. Then they went over to the despatcher, and I started out after the first crew.

I was used to watchin' the city die at night, as light after light went out in the windows, till only one was left here and there in the homes o' sick people. But to-night it was lonesomer than ever. Once I saw the doctor and the buryin'-man out on the streets, and grew afraid; for boys nowadays ain't like the boys o' '62.

I'd been proud to hear my father spoken of as a brave man, and wished that people would only be as fair to Uncle Epic. "They won't, though," I kept thinkin'; "they don't care anything for their country—only for the railroad. If that General Manager could only hear one o' Uncle Epic's pictures, he'd feel what a hero is."

I'd always tried to imagine that I was a kind of sentry, callin' out soldiers who were to see that the night went well for the nation. But now I felt that nobody cared whether it did or not, and almost surrendered the whole thing. Sleet began to patter on the panes o' houses, and I lagged behind time, like a blind man who hadn't a single picture to remember or hope for.

After makin' the last round at day-break I went home and shook the ice off my coat by the kitchen stove. "Yes, yes; it's all cheerful and light to you," went on Uncle Epic, "and you oughtn't



Drawn by Worth Brehm

Half-tone plate engraved by S. G. Putnam

"THEY AIN'T ANY BOYS THESE DAYS LIKE THE BOYS O' '62"

to mind sleet and storm any more than we boys did at Donelson."

My teeth chattered so I couldn't answer, but I thought o' that General Manager who didn't take much stock in heroes that had fought over forts through storms of ice. "I bet he ain't even a Union man," I thought, and then asked Uncle Epic whether the country was goin' down-hill.

"It's goin' down along with the old stock," he said. Then he went into history, while I drank some coffee and went to sleep and woke, by turns. But history now seemed dead and distant, I couldn't see his pictures any more, and once I dreamed I didn't have any country.

Two days crawled by like this, and Uncle Epic seemed to be gettin' on very poorly; talkin' less and less. I knew he spent his time just seein' things, and when on that last evenin' he sat almost still I was pretty well scared.

I believe he felt that I didn't take interest in the war news any more, and since I'd come to understand that even General Managers didn't care about their country, I said to myself, "Then what's the use of only a call-boy standin' by it?" So in spite o' myself I was a deserter from the old man's thoughts.

I remember, one mornin' I was comin' in from the last call, when I noticed the General Manager's car standin' in front o' the depot. The engine had just made a flyin' switch far up the yard, and a freight-car comin' down at that minute, I boarded it in front by grabbin' the brake rod and settin' both feet on the beam. The car was runnin' very slow by the time we came up to the depot, and I was hangin' to it, about half under the wheels, when suddenly I heard a soft cry behind me.

As I turned my head I saw a little girl standin' quite still in the centre o' the track. She had both arms held out toward me, and o' course I caught as tight a hold of her as I could get. But my feet slipped, and instead of liftin' her up, I sprawled on the track beside her.

The brake beam touched my feet, and I stiffened my body like a piece o' wood. I couldn't have let go of the little girl if I'd wanted to, for I tell you I was stiff all over—my fingers holdin' to her like

an iron claw. The car was barely movin'; but it was movin'; it seemed an hour that I was scratchin' over the ties and cinders, tryin' to hold my head up, and thinkin' a lot of another car just ahead. I heard the town clock strike, the little girl's dress tore; then I got a rap across the forehead from the brake beam of the car ahead.

Well, it's a wonder I wasn't telescoped; but our car stopped still durin' that very second. So it came out all right.

I was in the Superintendent's office when I got over it; the General Manager was there, and so was his little girl, who kept tight hold o' my hand.

"I got my new dress all tore," she said, the first thing.

The General Manager spoke in a shaky voice: "I said there was good stuff in him," he told the Superintendent.

"A little o' the war stock, maybe," I managed to say, for I wanted 'em to be fair to Uncle Epic.

The Superintendent laughed a little, and I turned my face to the wall.

"Here, this won't do, Ben," he said, quickly; "Uncle Epic's a hero if you will; and you're just like him."

But I felt he didn't mean anything by this, and lay still; then the doctor came in to look me over.

The railroad company gave me a lay-off, and I stayed around the house with my head tied up in a rag to please the doctor. And durin' those few days, how Uncle Epic and I did go into history!

"I allow that bein' slid along the track by a freight-car is somethin' for boys o' to-day," he said; "though you didn't enlist for doin' that, deliberate. But let me tell you about chinnin' Look-out. Yes, sir, we had to draw ourselves up and chin it, with cannon swingin' our eye-winkers, and our hair burnin' like a time fuse—"

Never in all my life before could I follow him in and out of his pictures, among watch-fires, or slantin' bayonets, and he was surprised.

"I thought the old sperrit had been quenched out o' you," he said; "but maybe not; maybe not. Besides, actin' as cowcatcher to a freight-car shows a little bit o' the old stock; a conscrip' wouldn't have done it."

I was proud enough to hear him say this, and when my head would hurt and I'd stumble a bit, he'd cheer me up by callin', "Stan' to your guns, comrade."

One day I told him: "I can see Washin'ton so plain since I've been here with you this time; don't you think we could kind o' visit it in one o' the pictures, and you could smoke the Giner'al's cigar?"

But he said he couldn't, because in Washin'ton he could actu'ly see the whole thing in green trees and white marble and flamin' flags.

"What I want is a sight of 'em," he explained, "so I can take it along with me to the other boys. Maybe it ain't owin' to me; but I dun'no'."

This was sure hard luck to him, and when the General Manager came back to town and straight to our house and said, "Ben, tell me what you want," I answered, "Uncle and I want to go see Washin'ton."

"Umph," he said, and thought it over. "I've got to run down there next week," he went on then, "and you two can go along. I'll take Alice, too; she wishes to talk over the trip you took her on."

Well, after that maybe we didn't have a rousin' camp-fire at our house every evenin'!

"We know you're tired; still you mus' go Down to Atlanty to see the big show,"

Uncle Epic would call like an old rusty bugle; and he got out his uniform. "I've patched 'em in the evenin' when the big guns boomed aroun' Chickamaugua," he said; "but the moths are the only things which have gone up-hill from the stock o' '62. I'll have to wear plain peace clo'es."

On the last evenin' we sat waitin' marchin' orders, he was still so long that I began to scare. "S'posin', Benny," he said at last—"o' course it ain't likely, but s'posin' that I can't see when I get there, and just have to roos' around like an old hootin' owl."

I was a good deal troubled over one thing already, and this made it worse. "Why, you can't help but see," I told him.

"Well, s'posin' I can't; do you think you could tell me everything, just exac'ly as it is? I can't stan' for any mistakes, you know, 'cause these is matter o' history and I've got to take 'em along."

"I'll tell 'em exac'ly," I answered.

"Well, then I guess I can smoke there just the same," and he put the Giner'al's cigar into his carpebag.

The next mornin' Mr. Winslow called for us himself, and in an hour we'd started for Washin'ton in a private car.

"I'd just as lieve," said Uncle Epic; "though I wasn't a private when I quit."

The General Manager said "Umph" again, which worried and hurt me, too. For he seemed to have got us mixed up, and while treatin' me as kind as possible, he didn't take any stock in Uncle Epic. And it was the same way when we got to Washin'ton in the evenin' and went to the hotel.

"These eatings are like livin' among the sutlers," said Uncle Epic, but he didn't take much dinner. Instead, he was strainin' his eyes in every direction.

"I dun'no', but I believe I'm goin' to make it," he whispered. "Ain't that a gentleman over yonder, with a full beard, and a stock, and a long coat with embroidered wescutt?"

I laid my hand on the General Manager's for a second. "Well, if it ain't!" I answered.

"Ha!" he said, "you won't have much to tell me about Washin'ton to-morrow."

"I must be careful and not strain my eyes, or I'll be seein' things before I come to 'em," he told me after supper, and, bein' tired, we went to bed.

"I can see already that it's a fine day," said Uncle Epic the next mornin'. "Now, let's start from the monument."

We walked through paths covered with leaves till we came to the monument. "It's a shame to leave that half finished, as if it had broke in two," said uncle. "Still, it ain't such a strain to see to the top, this way. Now, how high would you say it is, Benny?"

Mr. Winslow, who had me by the arm, started to answer, but uncle whispered to me: "I'd rather have you tell me what I can't see for myself. We history folks have got to work together."

"Way up; about two hundred feet," I told him.

"That's what I've always told 'em," he answered; and then we walked to the White House, where he said:

"They ought to fence all this in, and tear down those darky cabins in the groun's. Am I right, Benny?"

"Yes," I answered; "it's a shame to leave 'em there."

"Now, my eyes ain't used to seein' it all at once," he explained, "so you go ahead and give me the partic'lars."

Then I told him it was all like one of his own pictures; with the river shinin' along one side, the trees yellow and gold with marble statues whitenin' through, and the great dome o' the Capitol soarin' high over the city.

"With the windy flags?"

"Yes, with the windy flags."

"Sure enough; I can see 'em all," he said.

We wandered around till afternoon, and I had to tell him lots o' partic'lars.

"Pears to me it ain't changed much," he said while we were goin' through the gardens below the Capitol; "I've been afraid they'd ruin it. It would be the same Washin'ton, if I could only meet just one old comrade to talk over Look-out Mountain."

"Umph," said Mr. Winslow; and then, "Here is your comrade; a statue just unveiled."

Uncle Epic laid a hand on his arm; "I know," he said in a low voice; "even if I was blind I could tell him; though he only stan's there in stone."

"There are lions crouched around him," added Mr. Winslow.

"O' course they'd crouch. Benny, I'm goin' to salute him; and then—why, then I'll sit down here and have a quiet smoke with him. I believe he'd like that better than anything else; he gave me the cigar himself."

"The same cigar," I said.

"Umph; Umph," said Mr. Winslow; and after uncle had lit the cigar, and sat down on the steps o' the moniment for a quiet smoke, Mr. Winslow burst out, as if he tried hard not to say it:

"The same cigar! Tell me the story, sir."

"When I took the flag and clim up one side o' the hill while the Johnnies clim down on the other, a musket went off in my face. I got the burnin' powder, but not the ball."

"Well?" asked Mr. Winslow, in an anxious way.

"Later, when I came out o' the hospital tent, the frien' leadin' me stopped by a man on horseback. 'Gineral,' he

said, 'this is a comrade o' mine who took a flag on the Mountain, and then had his eyes blowed out. I thought you might like to know him.'

"I saluted, and felt some one grasp my hand; 'I would,' said the Gineral. I felt him look at me, and he started to say somethin', but his voice broke down a little, and all he did was to put a cigar into my han'.

"And after his eyes was out he held on to the flag, and fit back a man who grabbed him,' went on my frien'.

"Course I wanted to give it into right hands,' I explained.

"The Gineral started to speak again, but he didn't have any better luck than before. 'Have another cigar,' he said, quick, like that, and with another strong shake he galloped on.

"The Gineral," he went on, lookin' up, "was Old Grant. And I'm the last comrade to have a smoke with him."

"Well, well," said Mr. Winslow; and then he was perfec'ly still until Uncle Epic finished his cigar. Then we went toward the last place of all—the Capitol.

"Who thinks I can't see him," said uncle, lookin' back for one second, "there among his crouchin' lions, reviewin' a million fightin' men, as we clim past him down the other side o' the hill ourselves? But we leave the country safe on top of it." And Mr. Winslow did not say anything.

We walked up the terrace and under the great dome, where for an instant Mr. Winslow stepped aside to speak to a man he knew. I turned around, for it was the first time he'd left us, all day, and I was afraid.

"Benny," said Uncle Epic, "I'll see no more; it's too strainin' on the eyesight. Tell me, who is this marble man in front of us?"

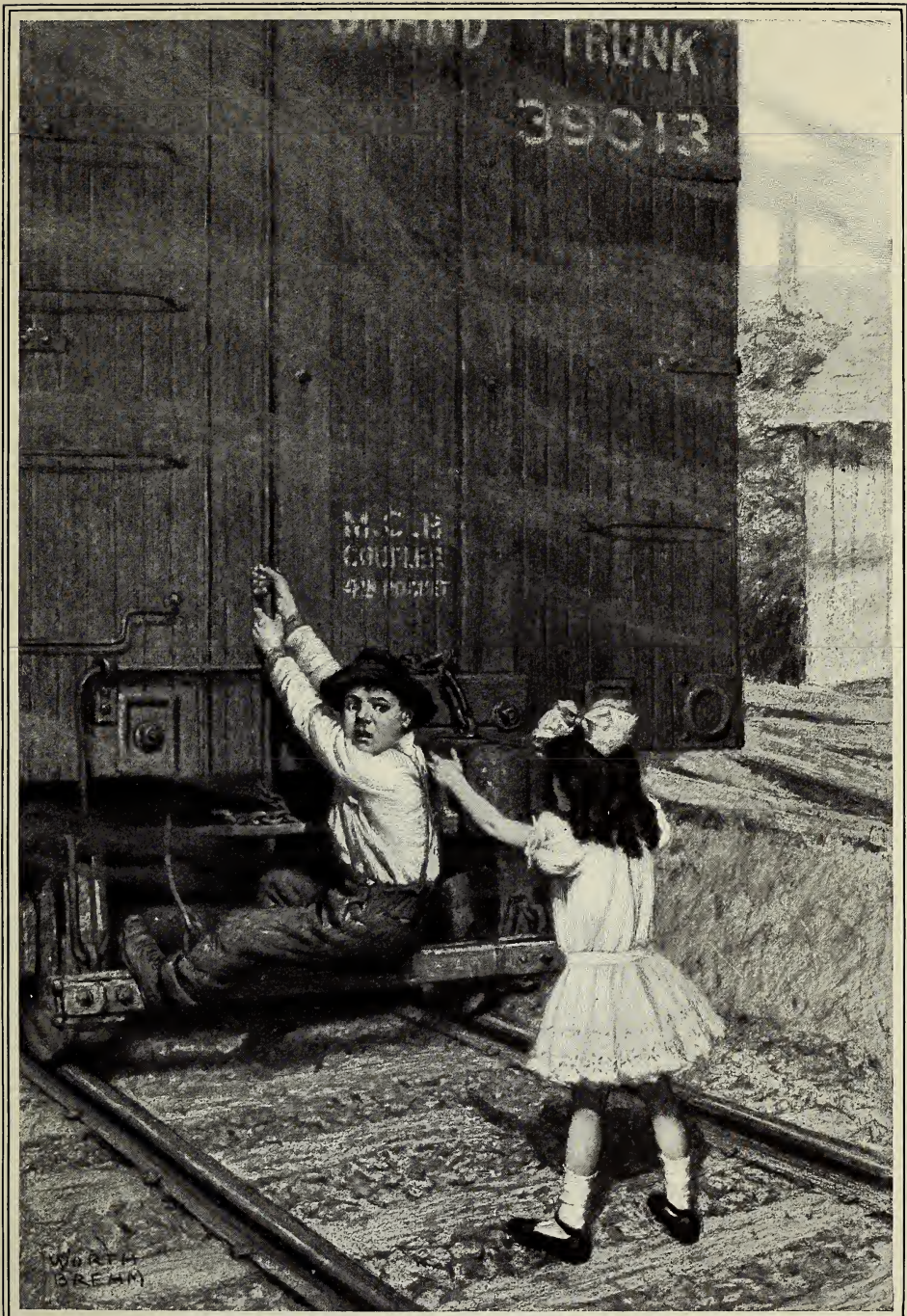
I hesitated, and my heart was leapin' at its strings.

"Why don't you answer?" he asked, quickly.

"It's Gineral—Gineral Jackson," I told him.

He stood quite still, as if frozen, and then he gáve a bitter, broken cry.

"Benny, it is the head o' Lincoln; I can feel the look on his face. Why did you say Gineral Jackson?" I heard him come on me, fumblin' with his stick.



Drawn by Worth Brehm

Half-tone plate engraved by G. F. Smith

I SAW A LITTLE GIRL STANDING IN THE CENTRE OF THE TRACK

"You traitor," he whispered; "you've told me lies; lies, before Old Grant and Lincoln!"

"I wanted you to see the partic'lars; I did the best I could," I cried to him, and then hid my face against Mr. Winslow's arm.

"Ben told you truly," he said, quietly, "everything as he has seen it."

Uncle Epic thought a long time, and I felt the breath goin' out o' my body; then softly he felt my bandaged eyes under the hat brim.

"I wondered that you saw the pictures so plain lately," he said, in a brave, clear tone, as if proud o' somethin'; "but I was only jokin'; why, I can see plain enought for both of us, and, Benny, our pictures were all true; I can take 'em along without changin'—"

His voice died away, and Mr. Winslow

spoke as softly as if we were in a church: "I wish to look on 'em, too—forever—with the same sight as you and Ben."

His arm was over my shoulders, and I felt him draw the old soldier toward us.

"Ben may see again; but I claim him whether he does or not," he said; "and Uncle Epic; I understan' now; I wish—oh, you must know how I feel about it—won't you just have another cigar?" I was glad to hear this; but gladdest of all for Mr. Winslow.

We stood still a minute, listenin' to footsteps die away along the corridors. Little Alice took hold o' my hand, and then I heard Uncle Epic say to Mr. Winslow:

"Stock o' '62."

And I was proud, and ashamed, too, to have so much said o' me, before the face o' Lincoln, in the house of the old flag.

The Precinct

BY ARTHUR LEWIS

I CARE not what the precinct be
Of my life, so the sun I see:
So that a guerdon of gay flowers
My window and my walk embowers;
And little birds, with peep of day,
And fall of eve, their fate obey.

I care not what the narrow round
By which my penury be bound,
So I be saved from voices vain,
The crush of greed, the grab of gain;
From vapors, and the laden state
Of them that hunger to be great.

I care not what the little view
Be mine of paths to pleasure due,
So breath be there, where peace abides,
Where lingers day—night nothing hides
That is not weary with the best
Of labor, kind, and come to rest.

Big-Dart INDUSTRIES

NEWARK, N. J. • LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

